Where Are You?

On Mercy, Will, and the Crossing Point

Adam, Cain, and David: The Geometry of the Will

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April 12, 2026

Second Sunday of Easter

Divine Mercy Sunday

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I. THE ADDRESS

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

— Dante Alighieri, Divina Commedia, Inferno, I, 1–3.

God's first question to a fallen man is not an accusation. It is an address.

Where are you?

This is not a request for coordinates. God does not ask because He has lost track of Adam. He asks because Adam has lost track of himself — because the one who was made for full presence has gone into hiding, and the question is the first act of mercy: a summons back to the crossing point. An invitation to the Now.

What Adam does with that invitation is the most consequential structural moment in the human story. And it is not what we usually focus on. We focus on the eating. But the eating is the wound. What happens next is the refusal of the remedy that is already present at the moment of encounter.

The woman whom you gave to be with me — she gave me the fruit.

There is no request in that sentence. There is no turning toward. There is explanation, distribution of cause, implicit accusation — of Eve, and beneath that, of God Himself, whom you gave. Adam is standing at the crossing point, addressed by the one who holds the Now open, and he looks away. Not out of the Now — you cannot leave the Now. But within it, he orients himself entirely toward the loops. Toward memory: reconstructing what happened, assigning its weight to others. Toward anticipation: managing consequences, calculating exposure. The one place he does not look is directly at what is being offered to him.

This is the structure of deflection. Not absence from the Now, but refusal of what the Now contains.

II. THE SECOND QUESTION

God asks the same kind of question twice. The second time, the situation is worse.

Where is your brother?

Cain has just killed Abel. The question is not forensic — God is not gathering evidence. It is again an address, again a summons, again an invitation to stand at the crossing point and receive what is already present there. The question leaves a gap. That gap is the space of return.

Cain fills it immediately.

Am I my brother's keeper?

Where Adam deflected by explaining, Cain deflects by interrogating. He answers a question with a question — not to seek understanding, but to refuse the premise of being found. Adam looked toward the loops. Cain looks at God and denies the relevance of the address itself. The deflection is harder, the orientation away from the crossing point more complete.

And yet the structure is identical. Two men, two divine questions, two refusals to simply receive what the question was opening toward.

Neither of them said: I did it. What now?

III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE WILL

This is not primarily a moral observation. It is a structural one.

The Now is where agency lives. It is the crossing point — the only place where something genuinely new can be introduced into reality, the only place the will is actually operating rather than narrating or projecting. And mercy, as we will argue, is not something that arrives after repentance. It is structurally present at the Now, always, as the condition of return — the possibility of reorientation that is woven into every moment of actualization.

What Adam and Cain share is not the gravity of their acts. It is the geometry of their response. At the moment of divine address — which is to say, at the Now, made explicitly available — both wills orient themselves away from the crossing point and into the loops. Into reconstruction and self-management. Into everything except the one thing that is actually present.

Repentance is not the cause of mercy. It is the reception of it. The will does not produce the opening. It either turns toward it or it does not.

Adam did not turn. Cain did not turn. And the question that follows — the question this essay is trying to answer — is what it actually means to turn.

IV. THE TURN

David's situation is, by any ordinary measure, worse than Adam's.

Adam ate fruit he was told not to eat. David arranged the death of a loyal soldier in order to conceal adultery with the man's wife. The acts are not comparable in weight. And yet David is the one Scripture calls a man after God's own heart. The reason is not that his sins were smaller. It is that his response at the crossing point was structurally opposite.

Nathan comes to David with a parable — a rich man who takes a poor man's only lamb. David's anger is immediate: the man who did this deserves to die. Nathan's reply is: *You are the man.*

That is the divine address. The same structure as *where are* you, the same structure as where is your brother. A question that leaves a gap. A summons to the crossing point. An invitation to receive what is already present there.

David's response is:

I have sinned against the LORD.

No explanation. No distribution of cause. No interrogation of the premise. He does not say: Bathsheba was bathing where I could see her. He does not say: Uriah was away at war and the loneliness was unbearable. He does not say: what do you mean, the man? He names what happened, attributes it to himself, and orients entirely toward the crossing point.

That is the turn. Not a feeling. Not a ritual. A structural reorientation of the will at the Now.

V. PSALM 51

But it is in the psalm that the geometry becomes fully visible.

Psalm 51 is not a confession in the legal sense — a recitation of offenses submitted for processing. It is a map of the will in the act of turning. And if you read it against the framework we have been building, almost every line falls into place with structural precision.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.

The psalm does not open with the offense. It opens with an address to what is already present. Mercy is not being requested as though it were elsewhere and must be fetched. It is being received as what the Now already contains. The will is not producing mercy by asking for it. It is orienting toward what was there before the asking began.

Against you, you only, have I sinned.

This is not an exaggeration and it is not a slight against Bathsheba or Uriah. It is a structural claim. David is stripping away every horizontal deflection — every attribution to circumstance, to the other person, to the situation — and going directly to the crossing point. He is refusing the loops. He is refusing the reconstruction of cause and the management of consequence. He is standing at the Now and looking at what the Now opens toward.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Notice what he does not ask for. He does not ask for the consequences to be reversed. He does not ask for the record to be cleared. He asks for the will itself to be remade. Because he understands, with a precision that most systematic theology struggles to match, that the wound is not primarily in what he did. The wound is in the orientation of the will that did it. What needs to change is not the past — the past cannot change, the loops are fixed — but the will's relationship to the crossing point.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart.

Here the psalm makes its most structurally important claim. The remedy is not a transaction. It is not a production. It is not the will generating something sufficient to earn what it needs. A broken and contrite heart is not an achievement. It is the will having exhausted its own loops — having run out of explanation, projection, self-management — and finding itself, finally, with nothing left to do but turn.

Mercy was present the whole time. The turn does not create it. The turn receives it.

VI. WHAT ADAM AND DAVID SHOW TOGETHER

Placed side by side, Adam and David are not primarily a contrast between a sinner who failed and a sinner who succeeded. They are a diagram of the two fundamental geometries of the will at the crossing point.

Adam is addressed and looks into the loops. He narrates, assigns, manages. He remains at the Now — he cannot leave it — but he refuses its contents. The will is present at the crossing point and oriented away from what the crossing point opens toward.

David is addressed and looks at the crossing point directly. He names, turns, and receives. The will is present at the crossing point and oriented toward what was always there.

The acts that preceded the address are, in both cases, already past. Fixed. Unreachable. The loops hold them now. What is not fixed — what is never fixed, what remains genuinely open at every Now — is the orientation of the will in the moment of address.

This is what mercy structurally requires. Not a soul without sin. Not an act sufficient to balance the weight of what was done. Just a will that stops managing the loops and turns toward the crossing point.

The turn is not the cause of mercy. It is the shape of its reception.

> *As illustrated in Figure I, the human condition is not a movement along time, but a continuous passage through the crossing point, where will, mercy, and the presence of Christ converge.*

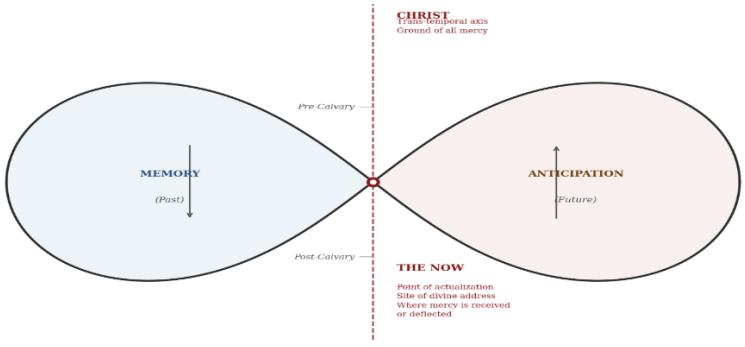

Figure I · The Lemniscate of Now, Will, and Mercy

Left Loop	Right Loop	Center ●	Vertical axis
Memory / Past Fixed; no longer actual	Anticipation / Future Not yet actual	The Now Only site of actualization Site of divine address	Christ Trans-temporal ground of all mercy

VII. THE GROUND OF MERCY

We have established what mercy is not.

It is not a reward distributed after sufficient repentance. It is not a response triggered by the right combination of feeling and ritual. It is not something the will produces by turning correctly. David's turn did not create what he received. Adam's refusal did not destroy what was offered. The availability of mercy at the crossing point is not contingent on what the will does with it.

This raises the question the structural argument cannot answer from within itself. If mercy is always present at the Now — if it is woven into the crossing point as a permanent condition of return — what holds it there? The Now, as argued, has no reserves of its own. It is sustained from outside the structure it makes possible. Whatever is permanently present at the Now must be grounded in whatever permanently sustains the Now.

The name for that ground, within the tradition this essay is thinking alongside, is not an abstraction. It is a person.

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made.*

If nothing becomes actual except at the Now, and nothing is made except through the Word, then the Word is present at every act of actualization — not as a distant first cause who initiated the structure and withdrew, but as the continuous ground of every crossing. The Now is sustained by I AM. The mercy available at the Now is grounded in the one through whom every Now is held open.

This is not poetry imported to decorate a philosophical argument. It is the structural consequence of what a previous essay already established. Follow the chain of dependencies to its terminus and you find not just self-sustaining being, but self-sustaining being that is — as the prologue of John insists — also the ground of all making. Mercy is present at every Now because the one who is mercy is present at every Now. Not occasionally. Not after a certain point in history. Continuously, without interruption, as the condition of the crossing point itself. (cf. CCC 2001: "The preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace.")

VIII. THE PROBLEM CALVARY RAISES

But here the tradition presses back, and it presses back with precision.

If mercy is always present at the Now, grounded in Christ's continuous presence at every crossing point, what does Calvary actually do? If David could receive mercy centuries before the Incarnation, if the righteous before Christ could genuinely encounter the ground of mercy at the Now — what changes at the Cross? Is Calvary merely a revelation of what was always the case? A dramatic announcement of a fact already operative?

That answer is too thin. The tradition does not treat the Cross as a clarification. It treats it as an event of cosmic consequence. Something happens at Calvary that had not happened before. The question is what.

The answer requires distinguishing two things that are easy to collapse: the availability of mercy, and the full opening of what mercy makes possible.

IX. WHAT WAS ALWAYS TRUE

Mercy was always available at the Now. This is not a claim invented to resolve a theological puzzle. It is what the data of Scripture requires.

David receives genuine forgiveness. The psalm is not a record of partial relief — a down payment pending a future transaction. You do not delight in sacrifice — the remedy is not deferred, not provisional, not awaiting ratification. The broken and contrite heart receives what it turns toward. The will that orients at the crossing point finds mercy actually present.

The same structure holds for the righteous before Christ — those who, in the tradition's language, awaited redemption not in punishment but in expectation. The Catechism's description of Christ descending to the dead is not a description of mercy arriving late. It is a description of what was already real becoming fully unveiled. The righteous dead are not surprised by Christ. They are met by the one toward whom their turning had always been oriented, whose presence at their Now had always been the ground of what they received.

Mercy before Calvary is real mercy. Not a symbol of future mercy. Not a legal fiction pending historical events. Real reception of what is genuinely present at the crossing point. Yet this reception, though complete in its order, does not yet constitute the full entry into unmediated communion. What is received is real mercy, but not yet the unveiled vision toward which mercy is ordered.

X. WHAT CALVARY OPENS

And yet something changes. Not in God — the tradition is unanimous on this. Calvary introduces no new disposition in God toward humanity. God does not become merciful at the Cross. Mercy is not unlocked by sufficient suffering. That picture makes God a creditor and Christ a payment, which is precisely the transactional model the structure of this essay has been dismantling.

What changes at Calvary is not God. What changes is the created order. More precisely: what was always ontologically grounded in Christ becomes historically and cosmically accessible. The limit was never in mercy itself, but in the created order's capacity to receive its full depth.

Before the Cross, mercy is available at every Now, and genuine return is possible, and the will that turns truly receives. But there is a barrier within creation that mercy, so to speak, cannot yet fully cross — not because mercy is insufficient, but because the structure of creation has not yet been opened from the inside. The full communion toward which mercy points — what the tradition calls the Beatific Vision, the unmediated presence of God — is not yet accessible within the created order. The righteous before Christ receive mercy truly, but they do not yet enter what mercy is ultimately oriented toward. They wait. Not in punishment. In expectation.

Calvary is the moment when God, from within creation, breaks open the barrier that creation could not break from within itself. Not from outside, issuing a declaration. From inside — taking on the full weight of the human condition, including death, and passing through it. The Resurrection is not a reversal of the Cross. It is its completion: the created order, in Christ, now open all the way through.

What changes at Calvary is not the availability of mercy. What changes is the destination mercy can now reach within creation. (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 633, 637, 1026–1029)

XI. THE CHRISTIC AXIS

This is what it means to say that Christ is the axis of every Now.

Before the Incarnation, Christ is present at every crossing point as the eternal Word — the ground of all making, the source of all mercy, the one toward whom every genuine turning is oriented, whether the one turning knows His name or not. The mercy David receives is Christ's mercy. The ground of the Now that holds Adam's invitation open is Christ's ground. The one who asks *where are you* is not asking on behalf of a mercy that has not yet arrived. He is the mercy that is already there.

After Calvary, Christ is present at every crossing point as the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord — the one who has passed through death and opened what death had closed. The mercy is the same mercy. The ground is the same ground. But the full opening that mercy was always pointing toward is now, within the created order, accessible.

The lemniscate does not change its shape at Calvary. The crossing point does not move. What changes is what the crossing point now opens into. The figure is the same. The door at the center is now open all the way through — not newly created, but newly traversable within the structure of creation.

XII. ADAM, DAVID, AND THE AXIS

Return now to the two figures with whom this essay began.

Adam stands at the crossing point in the immediate aftermath of the first deflection, addressed by the one who holds the Now open, and looks away. The mercy is present. The axis is present. The invitation is real and the possibility of return is genuine. He refuses it — not because mercy has not yet arrived, but because the will, at the crossing point, orients itself into the loops.

David stands at the crossing point centuries later, addressed by the same one through a prophet's parable, and turns. The mercy he receives is not different in kind from what Adam refused. It is the same mercy, at the same crossing point, grounded in the same axis. What is different is only the geometry of the will.

Neither of them stands on the other side of Calvary. Both of them stand at the Now. Both of them are addressed by the one who grounds the Now. What is available to them at the crossing point is real — genuinely, fully real — because its source is not located in historical time but in the one who holds all time open simultaneously.

The Cross has not yet occurred within their historical horizon. Yet its ground — the Christ through whom all mercy is given — is already present at every Now, such that what will be revealed in history is already operative in the order of grace.

XIII. THE CONCLUSION

Every moment of your existence is an address.

Not occasionally, not in moments of crisis or clarity, not only when a prophet arrives with a parable designed to find you. Every crossing of the Now — every single act of actualization in which you pass through the only point where reality is genuinely decided — is a summons. The one who holds the Now open is present at the crossing point

not as a distant observer waiting to see what you will do, but as the ground of the very moment in which you are doing it. You cannot step outside the Now. You cannot avoid the address. The question is only ever what the will does with it.

Adam was at the Now. The mercy was present. He looked into the loops.

Cain was at the Now. The mercy was present. He questioned the address itself.

David was at the Now. The mercy was present. He turned.

The difference between them is not the gravity of the act that preceded the address. It is not the depth of feeling that accompanied the response. It is not the sophistication of the theology they brought to the crossing point. It is geometry. The will either orients toward what the Now contains, or it orients away. There is no third position. You are always at the crossing point and the crossing point is never empty.

This is what repentance actually is, stripped of its transactional residue. Not a performance sufficient to move a distant God toward mercy. Not a feeling intense enough to deserve what was previously withheld. Not a cause that produces an effect. It is the will, having exhausted the loops — having run out of explanation and projection and self-management — finding itself at the crossing point with nothing left but the turn. And discovering, in the turning, that what it thought it needed to earn was the condition of the very Now in which the turning occurs.

Calvary does not install mercy at the crossing point. Calvary opens, from within creation, the full depth of what the crossing point was always opening toward. The address was always real. The mercy was always present. The axis was always there. What the Cross does is break open the destination — so that the will which turns at the Now does not merely receive what was always available, but enters what was always intended.

The essay *"Does Time Need Me, or Do I Need Time?"* ended with a question that could not be answered from within the structure it described. What holds the Now open? The answer was I AM — the self-sustaining, non-temporal absolute whose name is pure present tense.

This essay ends with the consequence of that answer at the level of the will. If I AM holds the Now open, and the Now is where God and creature meet, then every moment of your existence is not merely a point of actualization. It is an encounter. The loops are real — memory and anticipation, the weight of what was done and the anxiety of what is coming — but they are not where you are. You are at the crossing point. You are always at the crossing point. And at the crossing point, the question is never whether mercy is present.

The question is only whether you are facing it.

R E F E R E N C E S

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Oscar Gaitan. Does Time Need Me, or Do I Need Time? April 2026.